



Warygrove

EX LIBRIS











# *An Outline of Biography*

*From Plutarch to Strachey*

With a Bibliography

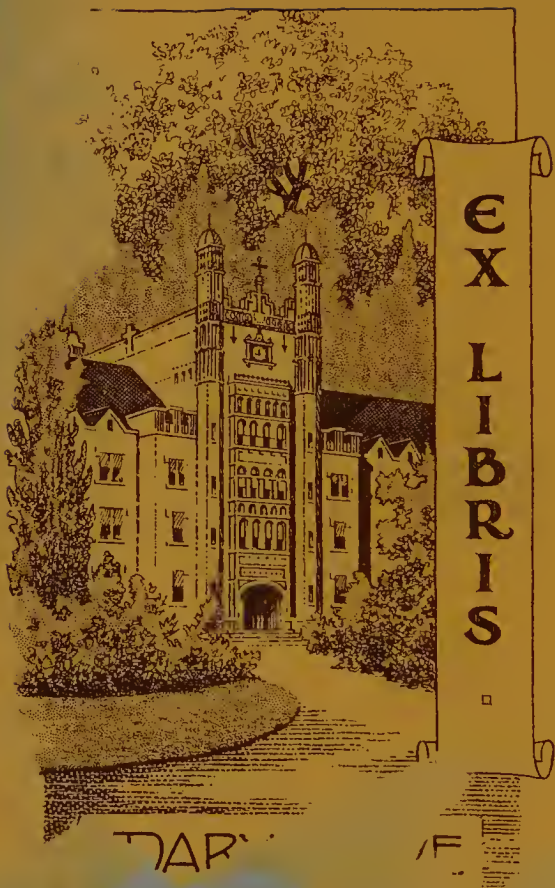
BY

WILBUR L. CROSS

STERLING PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH  
IN YALE UNIVERSITY



NEW YORK  
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY



120.1  
C88

# *An Outline of Biography*

*From Plutarch to Strachey*

With a Bibliography

BY

WILBUR L. CROSS

STERLING PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH  
IN YALE UNIVERSITY



NEW YORK

HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY

COPYRIGHT, 1924,  
BY  
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY

*Printed in the  
United States of America*

## PREFACE

THIS little essay was first given as an address at Columbia University in the summer of 1921. In the following October it was published in "The Yale Review." The aim was to indicate in a general way the devious course taken by biography since Plutarch down to our own times, as a guide in the history of a literary *genre* that has its traditions as much as the novel or the drama. Apparently many readers have found the essay, short as it is, of interest and value; and in some instances it has been used in college classes where attention is given to biography. From time to time there have been requests that it be made available in a convenient form; and it is for this reason that the essay is now reprinted for separate dis-

tribution. I have appended, in chronological order (without being too precise), most of the biographers named or referred to in the essay, and have included in the list many others for readers who may wish to go further into the study of a fascinating subject. The bibliography is necessarily less critical and less exact in historical perspective when it reaches modern times, where the purpose is mainly to represent the wide range of contemporary biography.

WILBUR L. CROSS.

*October, 1924.*

*An Outline of Biography*

*From Plutarch to Strachey*



# *An Outline of Biography*

## *From Plutarch to Strachey*

BIOGRAPHY next to fiction is the kind of reading most people now like best. As I once wrote a book on the novel and have since written the lives of two humorists, I naturally go with the majority.

But this is not the main reason. When a man (or a woman) accomplishes something worth while in art, letters, science, statesmanship, or business, I try to find out what I can about his life and personality. Behind this desire which I have with the rest of the modern world is more than mere curiosity. Life for most people is a rather difficult piece of business. So we want to know not only how others have turned the trick against

fortune; we want to know also all the details of the game as they have played it. Perhaps we want to learn how to do the very same thing that somebody else has done—how, say, to write a novel like one of Thackeray's or how to amass a fortune and die a philanthropist like Carnegie.

Surely, too, we all have the impulse to vary and lengthen our own lives by living several other lives vicariously at the same time. Biography is thus a sort of Life Extension Bureau. A man who has read many biographies should have acquired a fairly good working knowledge of human nature, though he may never have mastered the Freudian psychology or wandered very far from a small university town.

This modern love for biography, intense as it now is, is no new thing. Some one, perhaps, will some day write a little treatise and call it "The Development of Biography" after the name of similar books on

the drama and the novel. That man (or woman), who perhaps is living somewhere even now, may try to show how biography like fiction disengaged itself from history of the kind we have in the Old Testament or such as Herodotus wrote; but if he is wise he will come quickly to those wonderful *Parallel Lives* by Plutarch, which one may read in the late Professor Perrin's exact and beautiful English. If he be a Dr. Dryasdust, he will dwell on the fact that the Greek biographer gives few dates for the events he describes, and that there are no footnotes telling how the anecdotes concerning Cæsar or Alcibiades or the rest can be run down to their sources.

It must be a relief to Plutarch, wherever he may be, to know that, quite apart from hearsay and anecdote, many of the documents he used, have been lost beyond recovery, so that he can no longer be checked up at all points by the scientific historians of

the present age. But Dr. Dryasdust even, though he may lament that he has no field here for the exercise of his gifts, will hardly fail to see how perfect are the art and workmanship within those limits that Plutarch set for himself.

Only the personalities of the men and women he wrote about concerned Plutarch. The lines which he drew may not always be correct, and others may seek to rectify them; but such as they are, the portraits have come down to us directly and through Shakespeare; and they can never fade.

The historian of biography will have to tell about the impetus that Plutarch gave to biographical writing throughout Western Europe during and after the Renaissance, showing by the way how Vasari and Walton, for example, varied the art they learned from their master. He will probably say that these writers fixed the form of a biography which, though it still survives, as in Mr. Strachey's

portraits of eminent Victorians, is really but an enlarged character-sketch with a brief summary at the end. He may turn aside to tell how the biographical method was taken over into hundreds of novels through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He will be tempted to write some interesting pages on death-bed scenes from Cleopatra to Colonel Newcome, closing with the remark that they are less frequent now, perhaps because death has been robbed of its romance by modern science—by our knowledge of the streptococcus and what it does.

After an aside like this, the historian of biography will pass on through memoirs and diaries and letters until he reaches Boswell, where he will stop for a very long chapter. Eventually, after traversing the careers of Gladstone and Disraeli, he will arrive at our own time, when any man who can pay the price may have his life written and published in two stout volumes including his corre-

spondence—all illustrated with portraits of himself from youth to age and with pictures of the houses where he has lived and thrived. This degradation of biography the historian will note, observing at the same time also the immense amount of biographical material, formless, incoherent, often irrelevant, that now gets into print when a great man like Roosevelt goes down into the grave.

The scope of biography has ever expanded to meet the requirements of new civilizations. Plutarch's heroes were the conquerors and rulers of the ancient world—statesmen, politicians, orators, and demagogues, whose conduct the biographer subjected, without being too severe with them, to the test of Greek ethics and philosophies as embodied in the teachings of Socrates and Plato and Aristotle. For him the center of the world vibrated between Athens and Rome. When Vasari came upon the stage the old states and empires had long since gone; and for the

Italian mind questions concerning art had become of supreme importance. Accordingly, he described the painters, sculptors, and architects of that great brotherhood to which he himself belonged. In turn Izaak Walton lived in an age when men were immensely anxious about the salvation of their souls. So his heroes were mainly churchmen distinguished for their piety. Charming is the word to characterize his portraits of Hooker and Herbert and Donne. The old angler, though honest enough to allude to the worldliness, follies, and vices of his churchmen in youth, passed them by lightly that he might have room enough to display all the Christian virtues they practiced in their prime. No one could ask for a more satisfactory biographer to describe the perfect circle of a well-spent life, from a genteel birth to a happy death.

Thus far, few English men of letters, so far as I recall, had been honored by a biog-

raphy, unless we include those sketches by Bale in his Latin compendium of illustrious writers of a past age. Vagabonds, highwaymen, and sharpers of all kinds were often written up for the masses, who then loved, as much as they do now, a story ending on the gallows-tree. But among these gentlemen I find no secular poet, no dramatist except Robert Greene, if "A Groatsworth of Wit" may be regarded as autobiography. Shakespeare had no contemporary biography. Ben Jonson had none. Dryden had none. Milton's were partial and fragmentary. Pope's were poor things. Fielding's was a still poorer performance. Nor was there any life of Richardson or Sterne or Smollett until long after they were dead.

To the twentieth century this may seem amazing. But the fact is that men of letters had not yet established themselves as members of an honorable profession; nor were they quite low enough in the social scale to

awaken the curiosity of people who delight in picturesque crime. Nevertheless interest was beginning to be shown in them by anecdotes and stories about them, half true, half false, which became the basis of future biographies. Historically at least, Dr. Johnson did a fine piece of work when he composed from such materials as were at hand the lives of the British poets of his own and the previous age. And then Boswell in his life of Dr. Johnson first depicted with fullness the career of a man of letters. His success showed that the life of an essayist and lexicographer may be of the highest interest. Since his time we have had biographies of all sorts of persons; but the man of letters is the most certain of the honor or dishonor of having his entire career laid open to the public gaze either before or after death. A century ago, a poet or novelist (Thackeray, for instance) stood in fear of the biographer, not knowing what he might uncover. This fear he should have no longer,

for faults of character, in the present temper of the world, are mostly excused on the ground that they show the subject to have been human like the rest of us.

With a few capital exceptions, I prefer to read a man's life as written by himself. Dr. Johnson went so far as to declare such a biography the best to be had, since the writer knows all the particulars and no one else can know them. Autobiography, of course, has its limitations. The view a man takes of himself, though he has all the facts, must be partial and one-sided; he puts into the account and leaves out what he pleases with equal unconcern; usually he does not see his career in true perspective, and he often deceives himself on the why and wherefore of his conduct at the crucial points of his history. The incidents of his life as he gives them need to be supplemented, and the motives underlying his acts need to be canvassed by an outsider. Moreover, he can hardly hope to escape the

charge of vanity, of merely appearing to be frank where no frankness really is, and of suppressing facts that would damage his case if he has one.

Still, these limitations do not always appear; and any man who writes his own life, however much he may try to conceal himself, gives himself away. Herbert Spencer's autobiography is hardly more than a restatement of his philosophy and as such it has little value; and yet it shows him to have been almost a purely intellectual being of colossal egotism in whom the human affections ran low. From Darwin's autobiography a reader might not infer that the man gave the world an hypothesis which has revolutionized natural science, but he would see at once that Darwin was the most modest of men, really underrating his great achievements, and that he possessed all those human characteristics which Spencer lacked. Rousseau in his "Confessions" did not really shrive himself, but

his sophistry and emotional psychology betrayed him as a complete sentimentalist; whereas St. Augustine in his "Confessions" was over-emphatic on the dissoluteness of his youth in order to gain a dark background for the splendor of the virtues he developed later. Tolstoi, I think, did the same thing. If none of us may hope for the fame of Tolstoi or St. Augustine, we may, I trust, take some satisfaction in having begun life with a cleaner record.

The man who relates his own life, though he may go much as he pleases, must have some motive for what he does. He may write out a brief story merely for the information of his family or descendants, as did Darwin and Sterne and Scott. Huxley wrote his delightful autobiography in order to set readers right on the facts of his life which were in danger of being perverted by the maker of a biographical dictionary. John Stuart Mill had two reasons for his autobiography. His

first reason was to expose "the wretched waste" of time in the English system of education. He showed how in his own case a great mind was built up, under the guidance of a stern father, by a thorough study of the ancient classics, philosophy, economics, and science; so that at the age of fourteen he had gone far beyond any graduate of Oxford or Cambridge. His second reason was to tell posterity how much he was indebted to a platonic affection for Mrs. Taylor. This is the hallucination that makes Mill mortal. All his thoughts when in the presence of this not very remarkable woman he attributed to her inspiration, unaware that they were the product of his own fertile brain. Like Mill's, Henry Adams's main motive, as he put it into his title, was to let the world know how he had been educated from youth to mature manhood—only by a humorous perversity, he sought to prove that his education was a complete failure. On the other hand,

Franklin sought to show how a poor boy may rise by thrift and shrewdness to competency, and afterwards weed out faults and vices acquired on the way, ridding himself of them one at a time at sufficiently long intervals until he grows into a respectable and honorable gentleman, perhaps a diplomat or a statesman.

How difficult it is to write a good autobiography one may learn from Gibbon, who composed parts of his own six or seven times over, so determined was he to give an exact account of his "moral and literary character." "Many experiments," he says, "were made before I could hit the middle tone between a dull chronicle and a rhetorical declamation." Everybody should know how the magnificent theme of his history came to Gibbon on a visit to Rome, as he "sat musing amidst the ruins of the Capitol, while the bare-footed friars were singing vespers in the Temple of Jupiter." Almost equally eloquent is the

passage in which he tells of the completion of his great work twenty-odd years later on a June evening in his garden at Lausanne: "After laying down my pen, I took several turns in a *berceau*, or covered walk of acacias, which commands a prospect of the country, the lake, and the mountains. The air was temperate, the sky was serene, the silver orb of the moon was reflected from the waters, and all nature was silent. I will not dissemble the first emotions of joy on the recovery of my freedom and perhaps the establishment of my fame." What memorable words! For words like these from Shakespeare on "Hamlet," or "Lear," or "the dark lady" of the Sonnets we would surrender without reluctance all that Sir Sidney Lee has written of him.

Now and then a man, like General Grant or Mr. Bok, has given almost perfect objectivity to an autobiography while keeping himself in the foreground. This is a rare

combination. Goethe, for another instance, took a cool survey of his youth, as if he had but a scientific interest in what he then did or in what then happened to him. His mind was in the main intent upon discovering the influences of youth upon the mature man. There was, as I remember, no remorse for any phase of his conduct, not even for his treatment of Friederike. Much the same is true of Benvenuto Cellini, who, though himself the hero, wrote as if he were describing the adventures of another man, and drew a broad and living picture of Italy at the time of the Renaissance, when art and crime were equally glorious. Nor should we forget Trollope, who wrote for money, who laid his watch on the table before him and wrote down 250 words every fifteen minutes. One by one he passed in review his many novels composed in this way, pointing out the defects and excellences of each precisely as if he were writing of Dickens or Thackeray.

Trollope's aloofness was so triumphant as to be amusing.

The most amusing biographies, however, are among intimate personal narratives pervaded with harmless vanity, and often with some scandal. When Colley Cibber's "Apology" appeared, Fielding remarked that the "great man" appeared to have lived the life therein recorded only in order to write an apology for it. Again, some time ago, Margot Asquith lost the place she had long held in the sun and at the same time saw her husband's reputation for statesmanship challenged. So "the Woman with the Serpent's Tongue" published an autobiography, and came back gloriously like Napoleon from Elba, bringing with her a vindication of Mr. Asquith's policies. The seventeenth century also had a Margot Asquith. She was the Margaret, Duchess of Newcastle, whom Charles Lamb called "a dear friend of mine, of the last century but one . . . the some-

what fantastical and original-brained, generous Margaret Newcastle." Lamb's sentence perhaps sufficiently characterizes the first Margot's vainglorious autobiography, written, she informed the public, so that "after ages" might know that she "was the second wife of the Lord Marquis of Newcastle; for my Lord having had two wives, I might easily have been mistaken, especially if I should die, and my Lord marry again." Her husband, tutor to the young Prince of Wales (afterwards Charles the Second), a brave general and competent statesman, she celebrated in "The Life of the Thrice Noble, High and Puissant Prince, William Cavendish . . . By the thrice Noble, Illustrious, and Excellent Princess, Margaret, Duchess of Newcastle." Not only was the Duke, as he appears in this biography, "a pattern for all gentlemen," but all his children (born of the first marriage) were "dutiful and obedient, free from vices, noble and generous,

both in their natures and actions." On reading the book the year after its publication, Pepys wrote in his Diary: "Stayed at home reading the ridiculous History of my Lord Newcastle, wrote by his wife, which shows her to be a mad, conceited, ridiculous woman, and he an asse to suffer her to write what she writes to him and of him."

The relation between husband and wife is so intimate that it is hazardous for either to write the biography of the other. The most that either can do with decorum is to publish the general correspondence of the other, properly arranged with the necessary connecting links. Mrs. Kingsley tried to do this for her husband, Charles Kingsley, and she succeeded fairly well except in spots and near the end, where she described him as "a most true and perfect knight," whose love for her "never stooped from its own lofty level to a hasty word, an impatient gesture, or a selfish act, in sickness or in health, in sunshine or in

storm, by day or by night." This sort of sentimental rhetoric John Walter Cross escaped in his life of George Eliot by merely publishing letters and journals with just enough comment to make them understandable, never with any personal reflections on his wife's career. Neither of these books, however, is biography; they are but books containing material for biographies to be written by somebody else.

Nowhere in English is there, I think, a first-rate biography of a man by his wife. On the whole, husbands have perhaps done rather better with their wives. At once comes to mind Carlyle on Jane Welsh; but even here attention finally rests not upon the wife but upon the husband in his gloom after her death. I remember quite well, too, the "impressionistic portrait" which Professor Palmer drew of his wife, Alice Freeman. He called it "a personal estimate, an evolutionary study." But here again there was eventually too much

of the husband and his sabbatical years when he and his wife traversed Europe. What Professor Palmer and others have attempted, cannot be done. Wives and husbands cannot be outspoken of one another in print.

Sometime, no doubt, the existing restraint will be removed from their pens, and then we shall have some entertaining biographies. In the meantime, any one who desires may read in a privately published volume Lady Lytton's highly spiced comment on her husband, the novelist, or what Pepys put down in cipher after quarrels with his wife—whose nose he tweaked on two occasions and who in turn threatened to pinch his with red-hot tongs. This is what we shall get if the muffler is ever cut out.

Nor can a son or daughter write freely of a father or mother. Censure would be regarded as impiety; and praise, though perfectly just, would be viewed with suspicion. Aware of this attitude of the public, Hallam

Tennyson in the memoir of his father rarely let his own hand become visible, and then mostly in anecdotes, and depended on reminiscences of Lord Tennyson's friends for an estimate of the man and his works. With rather better taste, Francis Darwin dealt in a similar manner with the life and letters of his father, the great naturalist; and his sister, Henrietta Litchfield, likewise with the correspondence of their mother, the charming Emma Darwin. Only in fiction can a son or daughter do more. Dickens transferred some of the humorous characteristics of his father and mother to Mr. and Mrs. Micawber; and Samuel Butler, who hated his father, put him into "The Way of All Flesh." Although it is but fiction in each case, Dickens, it has been felt, did not behave quite like a gentleman; and Butler's conduct has been denounced as "base and dishonorable." The conclusion is that children of great men may well collect the correspondence of their

fathers as a debt they owe to posterity. If they have the literary ability they should also publish it with all other important memorials, remembering always the limitations under which they assume their task. What a loss to the world it is that a son of Henry Fielding did not gather in the letters of the novelist; or that Mrs. Ritchie did not tell the plain story of her father's life in her own delightful way, including the best among those countless letters which Thackeray sent to his friends and which we should like to read forever.

Inevitably psychological errors creep into the estimate that one member of a family forms of the others. The closer the relationship, the less trustworthy the judgment. But as one leaves wife or husband, son or daughter, for the more remote members of a family, errors in judgment tend to fade, sometimes leaving behind only that sympathy necessary to all good biography. The per-

fection of such sympathy pervades Trevelyan's "Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay," wherein it is a nephew who speaks. Naturally Trevelyan was rather shy of praise or blame, but the book is a wonderfully fine piece of work, with everything in the proper place, beginning with Macaulay's childhood and ending with the inscription on his tomb in Westminster Abbey. On a smaller scale there is also the very interesting life of Jane Austen by her nephew Austen-Leigh, which has been expanded into many dull books on "the divine Jane." Likewise two sons-in-law, uncontaminated by the blood of the family, have written biographies admired by all who know them. A whole row of books and monographs on Pasteur may be found in any scientific library, but the only one that a man would sit up at night to read is the volume on Pasteur's life and labors by his son-in-law, René Vallery Radot. This is a book wherein one gets at the very heart of the

great scientist. M. Radot was charged by Professor Tyndall and others with showing a certain bias towards Pasteur when dealing with the scientists who paved the way for his discoveries. No similar charge could be sustained, I think, against Lockhart who, though he loved and honored the memory of Scott, was a trained critic accustomed to an independence of judgment which he could not lay aside in favor of his father-in-law, whose character he let develop through letters and diaries, with his own just comment.

It would be well for all cocksure biographers (such as Mr. Archibald Stalker, who published not long ago "The Intimate Life of Sir Walter Scott") to read Lockhart's final words, where he says that no man can "pronounce *ex cathedra* on the whole structure and complexion of a great mind" from any materials he may have at hand; that there always remain behind mysteries of personality which a man like Scott never discloses

and which no outsider can ever penetrate. Likewise, when Mrs. Carlyle told her husband that Darwin had asked her who would write her husband's "Life," Carlyle began to reflect how impossible it would be for any creature ever to write that "Life"; for "the *chief* elements of my little destiny have all along lain deep below view or surmise, and never will or can be known to any son of Adam." Nevertheless Froude sought to sound the depths of Carlyle's nature with the aid of what would now be called a Freudian complex, and in the process floundered amid domestic infelicities and lost his man. Similar results within a year or two have attended the labors of those psychoanalysts who have sought to pluck out the hearts of three American writers. Margaret Fuller, we learn from one, loved her father, if not too well, at least too long; and Mark Twain, we learn from another, was "a victim of arrested development," who in accordance with well

known psychic processes eventually "withered into a cynic" and a sort of "spiritual valetudinarian." Poe, according to Dr. John W. Robertson, inherited "a dipsomaniac compulsion" from his father, who, while a student of the law, had developed "an alcoholic syndrome."

While waiting for the Freudians to produce something better, the world, I fear, will have to fall back on Boswell's "Life of Samuel Johnson" as the most complete portrait of a man ever put into words. So great a book we owe to a happy conjunction of art and circumstance. No biographer ever had a finer subject for the display of his talents. As a mere narrative, any career like Johnson's passing through poverty on to eminence arrests the attention of all who read. And this particular man was, besides, peculiar in dress, manners, speech, way of walking even; he was a "humorist" in the old sense of the word. He had read in a multitude of books

of all kinds, ancient and modern; he had reflected on what he read, and so was ever ready with an opinion on any subject that might be broached. His opinions were likely to be colored by prejudice; but prejudice gave piquancy to his words, and behind them was always a truth which the most judicious could not ignore. Out of an honest heart he spoke always, whether with friends or foes. Withal he was generous, kind-hearted, and sound in his affections. Nor was Boswell the fool that Macaulay describes. His perceptive powers were acute and accurate. His memory was exact. His intellectual processes were honest. If he was a hero-worshiper, he chose a man worthy of homage; nor did he hesitate to call the great man to account when he became wild in his talk. Boswell knew Dr. Johnson as well as any man may know another. He traveled with him and hung about him for years; he asked all sorts of questions about his early life and spurred

him on to talk in endless streams; he listened to his conversations at the club and elsewhere, with Burke and Garrick and Goldsmith, and wrote down, immediately or soon after, the best parts of the conversations with a concise description of the scene. Boswell knew that if he could arrange as it should be all that he had seen and heard he would have Dr. Johnson's personality, so far as it was ever disclosed in his presence, clinched forever.

Boswell's art was akin to Sterne's in "Tristram Shandy," wherein the characters are portrayed by the opinions they express on a great variety of subjects, the theory being, I suppose, that if you know what a man really feels and thinks, you know him essentially as he is. Add as Sterne and Boswell did the clash of opinions with others, and the man, half dead before, becomes alive. Neither in fiction nor in biography have we anywhere a book more truly dramatic than Boswell's

“Life of Samuel Johnson.” Others have tried to do what Boswell did and they have failed utterly. Forster missed his chance with Dickens. Froude missed a rarer chance with Carlyle.

Numerous attempts have been made in these latter years to construct the biographies of great men whose lives for one reason or another were not written by their contemporaries. I myself have tried my hand at Sterne and Fielding, and have thereby learned the difficulties that confront the man who is sometimes facetiously called “a pseudo-biographer.” Between him and the true biographer there exists a difference similar to that between the novelist who would depict men and women of his own time and the novelist who aims to restore the life and manners of a past age. The one derives his knowledge directly and perhaps easily from what he sees and hears. The other must depend upon his reading; he thus works in the manner and

spirit of an historian. He must know the period in which his man lived in all its aspects—social, religious, and political; and this knowledge, if it is to be intimate, must be gained at first hand from the general literature of the period—from letters, diaries, and newspapers as well as from books. He must know down to the veriest detail everything his author published and all the memorials of him that have survived. He must consider the traditions that have grown up about his personality, and the anecdotes related of him, how far they may be true and how far false. He must search for unpublished writings of his author, and for new documents concerning him, always weighing their importance. If he discovers letters, or a diary, or a piece of an autobiography never before published, he is happy.

He cannot quiz Sterne or Fielding as Boswell quizzed Dr. Johnson, but he can bring under survey everything that got into print

about his man and thus learn what his contemporaries in various walks of life, friends and foes, thought of him and his books. The "pseudo-biographer" must thus substitute for his own perceptions the eyes and ears of others long since dead and not to be questioned further. His ultimate success will depend upon his ability to project himself into another age as completely as Thackeray did when he wrote "Henry Esmond." If his subject is Fielding he must in imagination grow up with him, go to Eton College with him, watch from the roadside as the young man attempts to abduct an heiress, sit with him in the greenroom drinking champagne when a play succeeds or is damned, ride with him on the Western Circuit, watch him as he presides over the Bow Street Court, be with him through all his literary labors, have words of comfort for him in his bereavements, and take the last voyage with him to Lisbon. Perhaps it is impossible to make a living being

out of a man one has never seen. But it is only by an imaginative process such as I have described that anything resembling life can be breathed into his nostrils.

A biographer who has no personal acquaintance with the man he writes about may proceed in one of several ways. If he is a pioneer he will be tempted to put into his book everything discoverable. I have been thus tempted. I had to settle the question what I should do with Sterne's *Journal to Eliza* and many other manuscripts which had long lain in obscure places. Eventually I decided to make what appeared to be a proper use of them in the biography and to publish them as a whole separately. With Fielding, of whose career so little had been known, I dealt more liberally, though I avoided, I hope, the fatal example set by the late Professor Masson. It is fifty-odd years since Masson startled the literary world with the first two of seven volumes on the life of Milton. After

groaning through nearly fourteen hundred pages of this work, and discovering that Masson had brought Milton down to only his thirty-fifth year, Lowell called for "a phial of *elixir vitae*," and afterwards remarked: "We envy the secular leisures of Methuselah, and are thankful that *his* biography at least (if written in the same longeval proportion) is irrecoverably lost to us." What was the result of Masson's lifelong labors on Milton? He collected and published everything relating to Milton and may have rightly interpreted the documents. Thereby he did an immense service to English letters. But Milton himself he submerged in a mass of political and ecclesiastical history from which it is difficult to rescue him.

And even if one takes the *via media*, as I did with Sterne and Fielding, it is still difficult, because of the documents, to keep the man always in sight. A pioneer must, how-

ever, include in his book the main documents with exact references, else he will not be believed. He may later rewrite his biography in shorter form, merely referring to his sources, and thus concentrate his efforts as did Plutarch on the personality of his subject. He will fail if he tries to condense; he must write a new book, using the old one only for his facts. If he does not do this himself, it will in the course of time be done by another. The biography of Lincoln that people read is not the standard work by Nicolay and Hay in ten volumes supplemented by twelve volumes of writings; it is Lord Charnwood's, which, though it contains few new facts, gives within reasonable compass the salient lines of Lincoln's career and character, with narrative and comment evenly balanced. The only man who ever wrote a long biography that cannot be done over is Boswell.

"A well-written life," Carlyle remarked humorously, "is almost as rare as a well-

spent one." What makes Lord Charnwood's "Abraham Lincoln," aside from its style and technique, a first-rate biography, is the author's clear understanding. The biologists warn us that "no one can satisfactorily explain *function* in terms of *structure*"; that from the constitution of the brain, for example, no one can predict all the phenomena of consciousness, though we are certain that the two are intimately related. So a biographer who has never known the man he would write about, may have at hand, or may discover, every pertinent fact about him and every essential document relating to his physical and spiritual history, and yet even then fail to present the hero in the habit as he lived. Why? He has never heard his man speak or seen him in action; he must divine as well as he can all those lights and shades which play over personality giving a distinctive quality to an act or even a word. However "scientifically" facts and docu-

ments may be interpreted, the living man will elude the biographer unless he has extraordinary insight and a constructive imagination of the first order. In the most favorable circumstances he only partially succeeds. Lord Charnwood's Abraham Lincoln is a consistent whole; and yet the portrait cannot be altogether true.

And there is always the question of style; by which I mean, of course, not mere phrasing, for style includes innumerable things besides that. Style is hardly more analyzable than personality; in a well-written book it is all-pervading like the air we breathe. Walton was equally happy in his phrasing and in creating an atmosphere of gentle piety. Boswell succeeded by sheer directness and honesty. Lockhart, the professional man of letters, sometimes strove for effects which now seem artificial; whereas Trevelyan, a less conscious artist, charms by his perfect naturalness and ease.

Mr. Strachey has been justly praised for the style of his "Queen Victoria." So, too, Mr. Guedalla for his brilliant portraits in "The Second Empire." Like Lord Charnwood, Mr. Strachey is one of those biographers who, making little or no claim to discovery, rely upon what has already been printed, with some verification of statements where manuscripts are available. The aim is not new knowledge, but a new interpretation of facts already known. Mr. Strachey, who had at hand many books including the Queen's diary and a scandalous chronicle, had but to read, absorb, and then select and recombine what would contribute to the portrait of Victoria which he desired to present. His method is more that of a novelist than of a biographer. Indeed, his book is dedicated to a novelist. Nothing is admitted that might appear dull; nothing is excluded that can give piquancy to the narrative. In temper, Mr. Strachey's art is not so much Eng-

lish as French. It has none of the genial humor that Thackeray let play over the Queen's ancestors among the Georges. It has rather the wit and irony almost of Voltaire.

Victoria was a symbol. She did not impress her personality upon her age as did the cultivated Elizabeth upon the age of Shakespeare and Spenser and Bacon. Without her the Victorian era, except for minor details, would have been precisely as it was. She did not read much. The amazing discoveries in science which she heard about left her cold, for her intelligence could not rise to an understanding of them. Even a novel like George Eliot's "Middlemarch" was too difficult for her. She preferred Marie Corelli. Nor did she care for poetry, except the resonant verse of Tennyson celebrating the blameless life of the Prince Consort. She had little imagination, and her sense of humor was rudimentary. She enjoyed a farce, but there

is no record here of her reading Dickens or Thackeray. So far as she was concerned, the world might have stood still. Though a woman, she thought the suffragists of her day should be whipped. She persuaded the editor of the *Times* to write on "*the immense danger and evil of the wretched frivolity and levity*" among the higher classes of society. The warning, it would seem, did not have the salutary effect she expected. She likewise interfered in the policies of her ministers; and sometimes prevailed; and yet "at the end of her reign the Crown was weaker than at any other time in English history."

There is doubtless another Victoria. It yet remains for a finer if less brilliant mind to trace the Queen in all her subtle influences on her age. No one, however, can deny that the book has atmosphere as well as arresting phrases. So has Lord Charnwood's "Abraham Lincoln." But note the difference. Lord Charnwood idealizes Lincoln, nearly

always giving him the benefit of the doubt in matters uncertain. Mr. Strachey throws the emphasis on Victoria's limitations. His biography belongs to the literature of disenchantment, which always leaves something out. When we read of Spoon River and Gopher Prairie, we are apt to forget that men like Grant and Lincoln grew up in places as drab and sordid as these really were minus the exaggeration. On the heels of the realistic poets and novelists now comes Einstein, who overthrows an infinite universe, by somehow proving that space rolls back on itself and that something, which I do not understand, has happened to time. So, six centuries after Dante, it has become impossible to follow the great Florentine as his mind is lifted from the earth and borne through the unending heavens, on from light to light, under the guidance of Beatrice. Did not Henry Adams seek all his life for those lights and did he not fail to see them?

In the literature of disenchantment there is no mysticism, and immortality goes by the board. Old Izaak Walton's churchmen had souls which were to find eternal rest in Paradise; and "the small quantity of Christian dust" they left behind them was sometime to be re-animated. Death-bed scenes, I have remarked, are not so common now as they were when Montaigne judged of a man by the manner of his dying. But Mr. Strachey has revived them. Victoria dies scientifically, recalling, as she lies "blind and silent," the outstanding events of her career back to girlhood. These shadows of the past hovering over the fading mind of the Queen, though they may appear as the fancies of a romancer, are supposed to be in full agreement with modern psychology. Albert and his friend Stockmar die in an agnostic phrase; they "explored the shadow and the dust"; while the Princess Charlotte, in the style of the realistic novel, "tossed herself from side to

side; then suddenly drew up her legs, and it was over."

Victoria would be shocked beyond measure could she see the glamour that once surrounded her throne thus fade and disappear.



## *Bibliography*



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

STORY OF JOSEPH. *Genesis*, Chap. 37-48.

LIFE OF DAVID. *I and II Samuel*.

HERODOTUS. *Works*, with an English translation by A. D. Godley. 4 v. New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons. (Loeb Classical Library)

XENOPHON. *Memorabilia*. Translated by Harry Spens. New York, E. P. Dutton and Company. (Everyman's Library)

—*Cyropædia*. Translated by H. G. Dakyns. New York, E. P. Dutton and Company. (Everyman's Library)

ST. MARK. *Life of Christ*.

TACITUS. *Life of Agricola*. New York, E. P. Dutton and Company. (Everyman's Library)

PLUTARCH. *Lives*, with an English translation by Bernadotte Perrin. 10 v. New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons. (Loeb Classical Library)

SUETONIUS. *Lives of the Cæsars*, with an English translation by J. C. Rolfe. 2 v. New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons. (Loeb Classical Library)

PHILOSTRATUS. *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, with an English translation by F. C. Conybeare.

- 2 v. New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons. (Loeb Classical Library)
- ST. AUGUSTINE. *Confessions*. New York, E. P. Dutton and Company. (Everyman's Library)
- EINHARD. *Life of Charlemagne*. New York, Oxford University Press.
- PETER ABÉLARD. *Historia Calamitatum* (The Story of My Misfortunes). Translated by Henry Adams Bellows. Saint Paul, T. A. Boyd.
- ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI. *The Little Flowers*. New York, E. P. Dutton and Company. (Everyman's Library)
- SIRE DE JOINVILLE. *Chronicle of the Crusade of St. Lewis*. In *Memoirs of the Crusades*. New York, E. P. Dutton and Company. (Everyman's Library)
- ✓ THOMAS À KEMPIS. *Imitation of Christ*. New York, E. P. Dutton and Company. (Everyman's Library)
- PHILIPPE DE COMMINES. *Memoirs*. 2 v. London, George Bell and Sons. (Bohn's Standard Library)
- GEORGE CAVENDISH. *The Life and Death of Cardinal Wolsey*. New York, E. P. Dutton and Company.
- GIORGIO VASARI. *Lives of Seventy of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects*. 4 v. New York, Charles Scribner's Sons.
- BENVENUTO CELLINI. *Memoirs of Benvenuto Cellini*,

- Written by Himself.* New York, E. P. Dutton and Company. (Everyman's Library)
- ROBERT GREENE. *Groatsworth of Wit.* New York, E. P. Dutton and Company. (Bodley Head Quartos, no. 6)
- IZAACK WALTON. *Lives of Dr. John Donne, Sir Henry Wotton, Mr. Richard Hooker, Mr. George Herbert, and Dr. Robert Sanderson.* 2 v. New York, E. P. Dutton and Company.
- THOMAS FULLER. *The History of the Worthies of England.* 3 v. London, T. Tegg.
- BLAISE PASCAL. *Thoughts, Letters, and Opuscles,* edited by O. W. Wight. Boston, Houghton, Mifflin Company.
- MARGARET, DUCHESS OF NEWCASTLE. *The Life of the Duke of Newcastle.* New York, E. P. Dutton and Company. (Everyman's Library)
- EDWARD, EARL OF CLARENDON. *History of the Rebellion.* New York, Oxford University Press.
- The Life of Edward, Earl of Clarendon. Written by himself.* 2 v. New York, Oxford University Press.
- JOHN HACKET. *Scrinia reserata. A Memorial offer'd to the great Deservings of John Williams, Archbishop of York.* 2 pt. in 1. London, E. Jones for S. Lowndes.
- COTTON MATHER. *Magnalia Christi Americana.* 2 v. Hartford, S. Andrus and Son.

- SAMUEL PEPYS. *Diary*. 2 v. New York, E. P. Dutton and Company. (Everyman's Library)
- GILBERT BURNET. *An Abridgment of Bishop Burnet's History of His Own Times*, by the Rev. Mr. Thomas Stackhouse. New York, E. P. Dutton and Company. (Everyman's Library)
- COLLEY CIBBER. *An Apology for the Life of Mr. Colley Cibber*. New York, E. P. Dutton and Company. (Everyman's Library)
- JEAN JACQUES ROUSSEAU. *Confessions*. 2 v. New York, Alfred A. Knopf.
- CASANOVA DE SEINGALT. *Memoirs*. 2 v. London, Chapman and Hall.
- SAMUEL JOHNSON. *Lives of the English Poets*. 3 v. New York, Oxford University Press.
- JAMES BOSWELL. *Life of Samuel Johnson*. 2 v. New York, E. P. Dutton and Company. (Everyman's Library)
- BENJAMIN FRANKLIN. *Autobiography*. New York, E. P. Dutton and Company. (Everyman's Library)
- EDWARD GIBBON. *Autobiography*. New York, E. P. Dutton and Company. (Everyman's Library)
- JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE. *Poetry and Truth from My Own Life*. Translated by M. Steele-Smith. 2 v. New York, Harcourt, Brace and Company. (Bohn's Popular Library)
- EDWARD BULWER-LYTTON. *Autobiography*. In his

Life, Letters, and Literary Remains. By his son, the Earl of Lytton (Owen Meredith). 2 v. New York, Harper & Brothers.

DOROTHY WORDSWORTH. *Journals*, edited by William Knight. 2 v. New York, The Macmillan Company.

SIR WALTER SCOTT. *Journal*. New York. Harper & Brothers.

THOMAS MOORE. *Life, Letters and Journals of Lord Byron*. London, John Murray.

JOHN G. LOCKHART. *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott*. 5 v. Boston, Houghton, Mifflin Company.

THOMAS CARLYLE. *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*. 5 v. New York, Charles Scribner's Sons.

—*Heroes and Hero-Worship*. New York, Charles Scribner's Sons.

—*Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches*. 3 v. New York, E. P. Dutton and Company. (Everyman's Library)

—*Life of John Sterling*. New York, Charles Scribner's Sons.

—*Reminiscences*, edited by James Anthony Froude. New York, Charles Scribner's Sons.

GEORGE BORROW. *The Bible in Spain*. New York, E. P. Dutton and Company. (Everyman's Library)

THOMAS BABINGTON MACAULAY. *Critical and His-*

- torical Essays*. 2 v. New York, E. P. Dutton and Company. (Everyman's Library)
- LEIGH HUNT. *Autobiography*. New York, Charles Scribner's Sons.
- WASHINGTON IRVING. *The Life of George Washington*. 2 v. New York, A. L. Burt Company.
- GEORGE H. LEWES. *Life of Goethe*. New York, E. P. Dutton and Company. (Everyman's Library)
- WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY. *Roundabout Papers*. New York, E. P. Dutton and Company. (Everyman's Library)
- COUNT LEO TOLSTOI. *Childhood, Boyhood, and Youth*. New York, E. P. Dutton and Company, (Everyman's Library)
- DAVID MASSON. *The Life of John Milton*. 7 v. New York, The Macmillan Company.
- JAMES EDWARD AUSTEN-LEIGH. *A Memoir of Jane Austen*. New York, The Macmillan Company.
- JOHN FORSTER. *The Life of Charles Dickens*. 2 v. New York, Charles Scribner's Sons.
- JOHN STUART MILL. *Autobiography*. New York, P. F. Collier. (The Harvard Classics)
- ANTHONY TROLLOPE. *An Autobiography*. New York, Oxford University Press.
- CHARLES KINGSLEY. *His Letters and Memories of his Life*. Edited by his Wife. 2 v. New York, The Macmillan Company.
- SIR GEORGE OTTO TREVELYAN. *The Life and Let-*

*ters of Lord Macaulay.* 2 v. New York, Harper and Brothers.

HENRI FRÉDÉRIC AMIEL. *Journal*, translated, with an Introduction and Notes by Mrs. Humphry Ward. 2 v. New York, The Macmillan Company.

JANE WELSH CARLYLE. *Letters and Memorials*, edited by James Anthony Froude. New York, Charles Scribner's Sons.

THOMAS WENTWORTH HIGGINSON. *Margaret Fuller Ossoli.* Boston, Houghton, Mifflin Company.

GEORGE ELIOT. *Life as related in her Letters and Journals*, edited by J. W. Cross. 3 v. New York, Harper and Brothers.

RENÉ VALLERY-RADOT. *The Life of Louis Pasteur.* New York, Doubleday, Page and Company.

ULYSSES S. GRANT. *Personal Memoirs.* 2 v. New York, The Century Company.

FRANCIS DARWIN. *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin, including an Autobiographical Chapter*, edited by his son. 2 v. New York, D. Appleton and Company.

THOMAS HENRY HUXLEY. *Autobiography.* In *Selections from Huxley.* New York, Henry Holt and Company.

JAMES A. FROUDE. *Life of Benjamin Disraeli, Lord Beaconsfield.* New York, E. P. Dutton and Company. (Everyman's Library)

- PAUL SABATIER. *Life of St. Francis of Assisi*. New York, Charles Scribner's Sons.
- JOHN G. NICOLAY AND JOHN HAY. *Abraham Lincoln, a History*. 10 v. New York, The Century Company.
- HALLAM TENNYSON. *Alfred Lord Tennyson; a Memoir*, by his son. 4 v. New York, The Macmillan Company.
- SIR SIDNEY LEE. *A Life of William Shakespeare*. New edition, rewritten and enlarged. New York, The Macmillan Company.
- ANNE THACKERAY RITCHIE. *Biographical Introductions to the Works of William Makepeace Thackeray*. 10 v. New York, Harper and Brothers.
- ARTHUR CHRISTOPHER BENSON. *Life and Letters of Archbishop Benson*, edited by his son. Abridged edition. London, The Macmillan Company.
- LEONARD HUXLEY. *Life and Letters of Thomas Henry Huxley*. 2 v. New York, D. Appleton and Company.
- AUSTIN DOBSON. *Samuel Richardson*. New York, The Macmillan Company.
- JOHN MORLEY. *The Life of William Ewart Gladstone*. New York, The Macmillan Company.
- HERBERT SPENCER. *An Autobiography*. 2 v. New York. D. Appleton and Company.
- HENRY ADAMS. *The Education of Henry Adams; an*

- Autobiography*. 2 v. Boston, Houghton, Mifflin Company.
- EDWARD V. LUCAS. *The Life of Charles Lamb*. 2 v. New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons.
- ANDREW D. WHITE. *Autobiography*. 2 v. New York, The Century Company.
- CLIFFORD W. BEERS. *The Mind that Found Itself*. Revised edition. New York, Doubleday, Page and Company.
- GEORGE HERBERT PALMER. *The Life of Alice Freeman Palmer*. Boston, Houghton, Mifflin Company.
- WILBUR L. CROSS. *The Life and Times of Laurence Sterne*. 2 v. New Haven, Yale University Press.
- WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS. *My Mark Twain*. New York, Harper and Brothers.
- ALBERT J. BEVERIDGE. *The Life of John Marshall*. 4 v. Boston, Houghton, Mifflin Company.
- WILLIAM F. MONYPENNY AND G. E. BUCKLE. *The Life of Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield*. 6 v. New York, The Macmillan Company.
- WILLIAM ROSCOE THAYER. *The Life and Times of Cavour*. 2 v. Boston, Houghton, Mifflin Company.
- MARY ANTIN. *The Promised Land*. Boston, Houghton, Mifflin Company.
- ALBERT BIGELOW PAINE. *Mark Twain, a Biography*. 3 v. New York, Harper and Brothers.

- JOHN MUIR. *The Story of my Boyhood and Youth.* Boston, Houghton, Mifflin Company.
- ANNA HOWARD SHAW. *The Story of a Pioneer.* New York, Harper and Brothers.
- LORD CHARNWOOD. *Abraham Lincoln.* New York, Henry Holt and Company.
- HAMLIN GARLAND. *A Son of the Middle Border.* New York, The Macmillan Company.
- JOHN MORLEY. *Recollections.* 2 v. New York, The Macmillan Company.
- WILBUR L. CROSS. *The History of Henry Fielding.* 3 v. New Haven, Yale University Press.
- JOHN ST. LOE STRACHEY. *The Adventure of Living; A Subjective Autobiography.* New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons.
- BURTON J. HENDRICK. *Life and Letters of Walter Hines Page.* 2 v. New York, Doubleday, Page and Company.
- GILES LYTTON STRACHEY. *Eminent Victorians.* New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons.
- THEODORE ROOSEVELT. *An Autobiography.* New York, Charles Scribner's Sons.
- RAY STANNARD BAKER. *Woodrow Wilson and World Settlement.* 3 v. New York, Doubleday, Page and Company.
- MARGOT ASQUITH. *An Autobiography.* 4 v. New York, George H. Doran Company.

- EDWARD BOK. *The Americanization of Edward Bok*. New York, Charles Scribner's Sons.
- BLISS PERRY. *Life and Letters of Henry Lee Higginson*. Boston, Atlantic Monthly Press.
- GILES LYTTON STRACHEY. *Queen Victoria*. New York, Harcourt, Brace and Company.
- PHILIP GUEDALLA. *The Second Empire*. New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons.
- PERCY LUBBOCK. *Earlham*. New York, Charles Scribner's Sons.
- JOHN W. ROBERTSON. *Edgar A. Poe; a Psychopathic Study*. New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons.
- THOMAS BEER. *Stephen Crane*. New York, Alfred A. Knopf.
- CHAUNCEY BREWSTER TINKER. *Young Boswell*. Boston, Atlantic Monthly Press.
- GAMALIEL BRADFORD. *Damaged Souls*. Boston, Houghton, Mifflin Company.
- LORD CHARNWOOD. *Theodore Roosevelt*. Boston, Atlantic Monthly Press.
- IRVIN S. COBB. *Myself Down to Date*. New York, George H. Doran Company.
- HENRY HOLT. *The Garrulities of an Octogenarian Editor*. Boston, Houghton, Mifflin Company.
- ROBERT UNDERWOOD JOHNSON. *Remembered Yesterdays*. Boston, Little, Brown and Company.
- SIR HARRY H. JOHNSTON. *The Story of my Life*. New York, Bobbs-Merrill Company.

- ROBERT McELROY. *Grover Cleveland, the Man and the Statesman*. New York, Harper and Brothers.
- MICHAEL PUPIN. *From Immigrant to Inventor*. New York, Charles Scribner's Sons.
- JAMES RAMSAY MACDONALD. *Margaret Ethel Macdonald*. New edition. New York, Thomas Seltzer.
- MARK TWAIN (Samuel L. Clemens). *Mark Twain's Autobiography*. New York, Harper and Brothers.









920.1

C88

Cross, Wilbur L.

LIBRARY  
aphy, from

An outline of biography.



!158 9

| DATE      | ISSUED TO                |
|-----------|--------------------------|
| APR 30 57 | <i>Ellen Donahue</i> 159 |

920.1

C88

